DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 278 614 SO 017 960

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TITLE Hestian Hermeneutics: A Lens of Analysis for Home Economics.
PUB DATE 18 Apr 86
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (67th, San Francisco, CA, April 16-20, 1986).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Critical Reading; *Evaluation Methods; *Home Economics; Home Economics Skills; *Sex Role; *Sex Stereotypes; *Womens Studies
IDENTIFIERS Hestian Hermeneutics

ABSTRACT

Feminist and women scholars in all disciplines have challenged the traditional masculist "lens of analysis" and have sought to bring into focus the "missing text" of female experience. This paper proposes an alternative to gender-bound lens of analysis because either or both masculist and feminist lenses are too limited to focus adequately on the new knowledge. Also examined is the unique position in which women and men in the female-defined discipline of home economics find themselves in relation to male-defined disciplines which incorporate a masculist view of the world and assume it to be "human." To gain a fresh perspective, the work of the "Annales" historian Fernand Braudel is examined. One goal of the "Annales" school was to reconstruct the past to recover the lost dimensions of everyday life and thereby "demasculinize" history (Stoianovich, 1980). In this model, the two spheres of human action are the private, identified with Hestia, the Greek goddess of hearth and home, and the public, identified with Hermes, the Greek messenger god. A Hestian hermeneutic is applied to Catherine Beecher's "Treatise on Domestic Economy" in order to reconstruct her intent. Beecher's message is that daily life involves both reproductive and productive processes, and that education must enable us to meet both demands. (BZ)

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HESTIAN HERMENEUTICS: A LENS OF ANALYSIS FOR HOME ECONOMICS

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Scholars use the metaphor "lens of analysis" to mean a corrective to unstructured or previously biased vision, an aid to focusing, whereby data can be organized so its meaning becomes intelligible. Historically, the lens has been masculist; it has been ground to bring only knowledge identified, validated, and legitimated by males into focus. Such a monocular view affords (to use Jane Roland Martin's phrase) "pride of place" to male experience and achievements and to the societal processes associated with men (p. 197). If knowledge is power, then knowledge used to reinforce male dominance, or patriarchy, becomes an adjunct of patriarchal power.

Feminist and women scholars in all disciplines have challenged this patriarchal perspective. They have polished their lens to bring into focus the "missing text" of female experience. They seek to rectify the masculist bias of patriarchy by including Woman in their way of seeing. In so doing, they reveal aspects of human experience previously hidden from view. In every discipline,

Paper presented at a Symposium, "The Company and Conversation of Educated Women: Are Home Economists Invited?" at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, California (April 18, 1986).

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the new scholarship on women has rendered previously under-reported and undervalued female experience visible. We now confront the task of making sense of what we see and attaching meaning to it. Validating and legitimating the new knowledge will be a formidable task. A masculist lens of analysis cannot do justice to the data. Nor can we expect structures that reinforce patriarchal power to be hospitable to new knowledge that challenges its legitimacy.

This paper proposes an alternative to gender-bound lenses of analysis because either or both masculist/feminist lenses are too limited to focus adequately on the new knowledge. It is also necessary to explain the unique position in which women and men in a female-defined discipline such as Home Economics find themselves in relation to male-defined disciplines which incorporate a masculist view of the world and assume it to be "human."

Gender defined thinking is so obvious. Making the "switch" from masculist to feminist thinking seems a logical step to binocular, or gender balanced ways of seeing. Yet by accepting genderized categories uncritically, women -- like men -- may screen out other aspects of human experience. In adopting these categories, everything must be made to "fit." But it doesn't always work. Why? Because we are simply exchanging (or reversing) the premises of a male-ground analytic lens for a new one ground by feminists. Consequently, there is little "shift" in what we see. It is somewhat like looking at a mirror image of the world of men. We do not bring into fresh focus the entire

experience of women and men -- past, present, and cross-culturally -- in a way that stands up to critical analysis. Arguments from either masculist or feminist points of view founder on perceptions and definitions of gender, on "woman's place" and "man's place" in the scheme of things.

Both categories -- "sex" and "gender" -- force us to treat females and males as polar opposites rather than as variants on a single human continuum. Such categories become conceptual traps that hold us to a way of thinking from which we have sought to escape. By contrast, if we accept human sexuality as a continuum of identity, appearance, and behavior (which are socially and culturally constructed) we still find that "feminine" males are more powerful in the public world than "feminine" females! For women to succeed in a "man's world," they must adopt characteristics that reflect male-defined experience and values. For Woman, this is a "no win" situation. As I hope to show, blind acceptance of gender-bound categories of experience is too limited a frame of reference to fully explain the "dilemma of domesticity" which frustrates women's attempts to be treated as men's "equals" (Hoye and Merrell, 1984).

The Limitations of a Gender-Ground Lens of Analysis

Gender dichotomous thinking produces false dilemmas that are not always easy to recognize or resolve (Thompson, 1985). While it is inappropriate to address these here, suffice it to say that gender-bound thinking leads us to argue about the wrong questions with the right rhetoric and the right questions with the wrong

rhetoric. This notion is reinforced by Martin's observation that "the assumptions with which we approach our problem are so deeply entrenched in patriarchal culture that we do not even recognize their existence" (p. 176). To work our way out of patriarchy's conceptual traps, we must challenge assumptions that have, for milennia, been "taken for granted" aspects of our everyday world and have been labeled "human." In claiming an education for women (and, by association, men) we must begin by challenging self-evident propositions.

Martin (1985) lays out with great perception and elegance selected ideas from Plato's Republic (Book 5), Rousseau's Emile (Book 5), Wollstonecraft's Vindication, Beecher's Treatise, and Gilman's Herland, and she discusses their implications for the ideal of the educated woman. She introduces the concepts of the reproductive and productive processes of society to differentiate two main emphases in the history of social and educational thought. She includes among the reproductive processes not just conception and birth but also the rearing of children more or less to maturity as well as such associated activities as tending the sick, taking care of family needs, and running a household. She includes political, economic, and cultural activities among the productive processes (p. 6). She concludes that education geared specifically to either the reproductive or the productive processes (at the expense of the other) will be an inadequate ideal for an educated person. Therefore, an education formulated solely for the purpose of keeping women in bondage to the reproductive processes or men in thrall to

the productive processes will fail on account of a person's need to live a life that embraces both (pp. 175-176). With this, I cannot disagree. The failure of educational philosophers in the past to provide a rounded or fully human approach to education can be viewed as attempts to perpetuate gender-bound educational stereotypes which support patriarchy.

Martin discloses an essential dilemma in the education of women and men, namely the need for each to be exposed to subject matter traditionally associated with the socialization and education of members of the "other" sex. By identifying the reproductive and productive processes of society and seeing their relation in classic educational thought to the gender division of labor, Martin provides an important contribution for dealing with this problem. Nevertheless, her dual classification does not explain or account for which (and when) these processes take precedence in an individual's life, and what in sum (or on mature reflection) is of greatest significance, meaning, or value to the individual, family, community, state, nation, or world. Martin's insights provide a major step toward a better understanding of a totally human education that must account for both reproductive and productive processes. However, I must point out that these categories transcend gender in their long term implications. In order to "see" this clearly, we must remove both the blinders of "masculist" assumptions and the hoped for "correction" of "feminist" assumptions.

Required: A Perceptual Shift

Sex and gender are relatively obvious. It is comparatively easy to categorize and classify human differences along the alternative vectors of male/female, masculine/feminine. However, by accepting such a "first cut" in sorting the deck of human experience, we become trapped by sex and gender categories and what they represent in a particular culture, society, and time period. We are then kept from adopting a more comprehensive view of humankind. To avoid this, we must retrace, albeit briefly, some assumptions about the "male world" that are accepted uncritically and which, when perpetuated in education, operate to the detriment of both women and men.

To refresh my memory and retrace my own educational experience, I returned to Van Loon's History of Mankind, first published in 1926 (the year I was born) and which my mother had given me when I was twelve or thirteen years old as a readable introduction to "world" history. Van Loon asked:

> ow ... did the ancient Greeks have time to look after their families and their businesses if they were forever running to the market-place to discuss affairs of state? ... In all matters of government, the Greek democracy recognized only one class of citizens -- the freemen. Every Greek city was composed of a small number of free born citizens, a large number of slaves and a sprinkling of foreigners (1926; 1954, pp. 59-60).

Sometimes, in periods of crisis, male "barbarians" might have citizenship rights conferred on them. But in Athens, the status of freeman was based on the status of a man's father and

grandfather. Women did not qualify as "freemen." Therefore, irrespective of who ruled the ity (by and for the freemen), it was made possible by the work of multitudes of slaves who outnumbered the free citizens at the rate of five or six to one. It was they "who performed those tasks to which we modern people must devote most of our time and energy if we wish to provide for our families and pay the rent of our apartments" (p. 61). Van Loon wrote:

> The slaves did all the cooking and baking and candle-stick making of the entire city. They were the tailors and the carpenters and the jewelers and the school-teachers and the bookkeepers and they tended the store and looked after the factory while the master went to the public meeting to discuss questions of war and peace or visited the theatre to see the latest play of AEschylus or hear a discussion of the revolutionary ideas of Euripides, who had dared to express certain doubts upon the omnipotence of the great god Zeus (p. 61).

Thus ancient Athens was a citywide "men's club," a nice place to live if you were a hereditary freeman who could accept slavery as a precondition to a "civilized" (or at least a "nonbarbarian") life. The means to this end was provided at the expense of the labor of slaves (female and male) and women (wives, mothers, daughters, concubines) of the household. Greek homes, food, clothing, and items of display were the work of slaves. To preserve their "freedom," the Greeks advocated moderation, or "voluntary simplicity." While, as Van Loon says, they may have "reduced their daily needs

to the lowest possible point" (p. 63), nowhere had they eliminated them entirely, nor did they discuss taking up these everyday tasks for themselves as part of the price of being human -- a condition prior to being Athenian. The systematic denial of the life of necessity, of involvement in the tasks of "everyday life," contributes both to the institution of slavery and the invisibility of women. It requires the perpetuation not only of a masculist ideal but an elitist one. Who can deny that the touted intellectual life of the Athenian freeman was maintained at the cost of denying freedom to others? We must ask about a system of thought that accepts unconditionally and uncritically the unfreedom of the many as the price to be paid for the freedom of a privileged few. The persistent need to address the perennial problems of everyday life -- of the despised "life of necessity" -- weaves like a lost notion in the intellectual history of Western culture. We might call it a "lost form" ignored by Plato and his followers. Yet these comprise the very activities essential for everyday survival, on which philosophers, plowmen, poets, and plumbers rely. Furthermore, they embrace both reproductive and productive processes. The model here proposed is an alternative to those built up on age-old masculist assumptions that are both sexist and elitist.

The Hestian/Hermean Model

To gain a fresh perspective, I have turned in part to the work of the Annales historian Fernand Braudel. One goal of the Annales school was to reconstruct the past to recover the "lost" dimensions of everyday life and, in so doing, to "demasculinize" history (Stoianovich, 1980). In the Annales model, the two spheres of human action are the private, identified with Hestia, the Greek goddess of hearth and home, and the public, identified with Hermes, the Greek messenger god. Elsewhere I have detailed the relevance of this model for Home Economics and made the argument for Home Economics as a Hestian discipline (Thompson, 1986a; 1986b).

The Hestian and Hermean spheres have a unique claim on our attention because they reflect the consistent concern of home economists with matters related to family, child care, shelter, food, and clothing ("hearth and home"). I refer to these as "Hestian" concerns, which arise from our basic needs as human beings. Psychologist Abraham Maslow has conceptualized a "hierarchy of human needs." The Hestian space/sphere is the arena of everyday necessity with its unremitting daily demands, including biological, social, mental, intellectual, and spiritual needs, all of which have a private, personal, and intimate character. The Athenian male establishment ignored baseline survival needs by delegating such essential work to others. They were then "free" to address concerns in the privileged

public space/sphere. Their privilege existed at the cost of nonprivilege. Hestian work, required for the survival of the individual and the family, was devalued in favor of Hermean work, required for the survival of the state.

This elitist dualism, as much as the gender division of labor, is a conceptual trap in which scholars are caught at the expense of consistency and clarity. The Hestian and Hermean spheres are not tightly boundaried. Systems thinking, an integral part of Home Economics, reinforces our comprehension of the Hestian and Hermean spheres as dynamic systems. Transactions take place across the systems' boundaries. The Hestian sphere can be conceptualized as a life support system mediated by the family, the institution that controls the private, "domestic" space of the household. The Hermean sphere can be conceptualized as a power system in the control of such public institutions as business, government, the press, and the Church. To use Martin's terminology, the Hestian sphere has concentrated on society's reproductive processes while the productive processes have come increasingly under the control of institutions in the Hermean sphere.

The Hermeneutic Task

Having recognized the "missing text" of female experience and superimposed a Hestian/Hermean lens of analysis as a corrective to categories previously labeled by gender, we are challenged to interpret what we see. Hermeneutics is broadly

understood to be the study of the interpretation of texts. A hermeneutic study belies a static, time-bound interpretation of texts. For example, if the Bible had not been the first text to be subjected to hermeneutic study, it would have been a dead issue long ago because people could not relate to a world of deserts, shepherds, and bearded prophets. Texts must be re-interpreted for their time with their meaning freed from outdated language and recast in a language comprehensible to a new audience. The historical method provides us with a rediscovery of women's experience. The hermeneutic method provides us with reinterpretations of that experience. For now, we will pose this problem for the understanding of texts uniquely tied to the lifeworld of women, especially Catharine Beecher's Treatise on Domestic Economy (1841). A Hestian hermeneutic is, therefore, related to the minds and lives of women as they experienced the Hestian sphere.

A hermeneutic designed to disclose and interpret the Hestian experience may be one way to take women out of the "ontological basement," a phrase Martin uses frequently. The hermeneutic tradition has been decidely masculist. Hence it is taken for granted that texts will be reinterpreted from one masculist tradition to another. Indeed, this is one method for transmitting patriarchal culture. The Hestian domain, however, is singularly keyed to "female" language. By contrast, socialization in a "scholarly" discipline requires that "ordinary language" be replaced with a formal language known only to the

practitioners of the disciplines, i.e. jargon. A Hestian hermeneutic must, therefore, address the deliberate mystification brought about by masculist language and conceptual categories. These become "standard" Hermean interpretations. Most scholars (male and female) are trained in Hermean language. It becomes a "ticket of admission" to male-dominant discourse. It becomes the "taken for granted" or accepted "scholarly" vocabulary -- whether or not its meaning relates to "real world" phenomena or only to the phenomena of a previously established abstract discourse.

Women scholars are also trained in Hermean discourse and made to accept Hermean abstractions uncritically. Feminist scholars are attempting to create new concepts and new categories by which female experience can be ordered and understood. However, in the past, elitist education for women has been largely Hermean, i.e. an education in male-defined categories of experience and thought. But the hermeneutic imagination is not confined by gender. We are not restricted to a literal recreation of the past and "standard" interpretations of texts by women and men. Most importantly, we must ask how a Hermean standard can properly be applied to a Hestian text. Women scholars have challenged the "masculist" hold on language. We can now focus on aspects of interpretation appropriate for "decoding" the meaning of Hestian texts.

What is Hestian language? Language used to communicate the events of everyday life and to create intersubjective

meaning around events related to the life of necessity. Hestian communication seeks to demystify masculist language, and sometimes even to replace it so that abstract Hermean ideas -- where appropriate -- can be communicated to another audience. Hestian language is used to convey abstract Hermean knowledge to "ordinary people." It is a kind of mediating language essential for meeting needs created by our human being and collective existence. It is a "common" language essential for improving the quality of life for people in their daily experience. To understand a text, we must go beyond its surface or "vocabulary" levels. Words alone do not reveal an author's special insight which, we can assume, prompted or "inspired" the work in the first place. It is the author's viewpoint that gives a work unity. To understand an author's intention, the reader must also understand the mind and spirit behind the writing. Schliermacher called the deeper, spiritual level of a work the "divinatory" or "psychological" level (Howard, p. 9). We must also consider this level in Catharine Beecher's Treatise if we are to understand her message for educators today.

I will now focus on Jane Roland Martin's "conversation" a propos Catharine Beecher. In Martin's view:

> A good conversation is neither a fight nor a contest. Circular in form, cooperative in manner, and constructive in intent, it is an interchange of ideas by those who see themselves not as adversaries but as human beings come together to talk and listen and learn from one another (p. 10).

In this spirit I offer a Hestian interpretation for Beecher's work as a prolegomenon to establishing a Hestian hermeneutic as a distinctive feature of research and theory in Home Economics.

Catharine Beecher: A Hestian Feminist

Catharine Beecher's Treatise on Domestic Economy has frequently been cited as the first textbook in Home Economics. It may well be the first modern text with a consciously Hestian purpose, i.e. assembling and disseminating "state of the art" knowledge ("know-how") necessary to act intelligently in the Hestian domain. Martin points out that it is a mistake to regard Beecher's Treatise simply as a description of domestic work (p. 103).

She says:

> In any society infants must be cared for, food must be prepared, clothing made, laundry washed, the sick nursed, gardens tended, houses cleaned. Beecher's case for her different-but-equal thesis does not rest, however, on this obvious point, but rather on her claim for the over-riding significance of the educative function of women (p. 123).

The acknowledgement of Hestian concerns as a legitimate focus for education is a major contribution of Martin's reclaimed conversation.

Martin describes Beecher's philosophy of female education as a mirror image of Plato's because, where Plato designed an education for his female guardians who were released from the Hestian obligation to home and children, Beecher's domestic

education provided the reverse -- a release from the Hermean obligation of citizenship. Now the argument against a position which denies women direct political participation holds up only if one uses a masculist lens of analysis built up on dichotomous genderized values to press the point.

We must ask what the question would have been had women not already been presented with the "received wisdom" of a patriarchal world designed for and dominated by males for their collective comfort and convenience, a world in which Hestian tasks (and those who perform them) are subordinated to Hermean tasks (and those who perform them).

In stating that "each individual of our race shall regard the happiness of others as of the same value as his own" (p. 105), Beecher proscribes securing advantages for one class by sacrificing those of another to any institution in either private or public life. Beecher is challenging basic assumptions in political philosophy passed down since Plato's Athens. For Martin:

> A Treatise is a remarkable philosophical achievement. In making clear that women are to be as much their own legislators in domestic affairs as men in political matters, and that the domestic environment poses problems so difficult and challenging that both a liberal and a professional education are required for its practitioners, Beecher is able to conclude that women's tasks and functions ought to command the respect that men's do (p. 133).

By linking theoretical knowledge to practical judgment, Beecher demonstrates the positive value that Hestian activities represent in everyday life. Beecher's philosophy is internally consistent, and this consistency is even more evident when we apply a Hestian/Hermean hermeneutic to her "two spheres" model. A Hestian hermeneutic enables us to reclaim the underlying meaning of Beecher's text so that its relevance for contemporary educational, intellectual, and philosophical thought can be explored.

It is not enough to dismiss Beecher's work as promoting "the cult of domesticity," unless we examine these words for their Hestian/Hermean implications. Beecher's failure to address the problem of educating husbands and fathers may be seen from a different perspective. By focusing on education for the Hestian domain, and conceptualizing this as a "separate sphere," Beecher was prescribing a curriculum for a neglected area of human action. We may also assume that the "capstone course" in moral philosophy to which Victorian men were exposed in their collegiate education raised their consciousness of what it meant to be "Christian" husbands. The predatory and violent predispositions of males were softened and modified by the Victorian ideal of "gentle civility" -- the code of the "gentleman" -- which contributed to reinforcing a stable role for men in the domestic sphere.

True, Beecher advocates a system of personal subordination within the Hestian sphere, but she sees this as a way to achieve

"social efficiency," i.e., equilibrium between the Hestian and Hermean domains. This "harmony of the spheres" was a paramount value in her philosophy. In her view, Hestian subordination was a matter of choice in mid-19th century America because women who marry have the right to choose a husband, just as male members of a democracy have the right to choose their "station in life," or vocation. Today we might ask what women and men need to know in order to make an "informed choice" in choosing to marry or in selecting a partner. Informed consent opens up the need for a considerable amount of knowledge. We must remember that Beecher was also a foe of "unfreedom" in the form of slavery. She advocated the education of unmarried women to achieve independence through the Hestian profession of school teaching. If there was a "cult of true womanhood" characterized by piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, we must see this as symmetrically related to the "code of the true gentleman" with its corresponding virtues of courtliness, protectiveness, responsibility, and honor. Through this ethical contract, equilibrium or balance between the Hestian and Hermean spheres could be maintained. This "contract" is implicit in Beecher's writings on domestic economy, i.e. the "economy" and "efficiency" of labor and resource management in the Hestian sphere. Thus the symmetrical spheres of private and public life were to be maintained by mutually reinforcing codes of personal and public conduct (roles). Beecher, we might say, was not rewriting the social contract of Rousseau so much as the marriage

contract of Blackstone's Commentaries.

Motherhood involves the reproductive processes. But "housewifery" or "homemaking" may be productive as well as reproductive. Beecher emphasizes the Hestian knowledge underlying the skills of motherhood and housewifery. Female-defined language for activities in the Hestian sphere needs to be developed and defined. To decode this dilemma, we must look past the Victorian language of the Treatise to the Hestian core of Beecher's concern. It is through Beecher's Hestian vision that she defined a new role for women in the household. To succeed, Hestian values needed to be reinforced in the Hermean sphere. That is, the social sanctions of the society were as important (perhaps even more so) than the existing legal sanctions. Her aim was the construction of a moral system rather than the deconstruction of a legal system.

Martin rightly points out that in Beecher's view the domestic environment is a domain not of mere skilled performance but of theory and practice joined together (p. 119). By virtue of special education (as opposed to natural talent) the homemaker under Beecher's regime is to become a self-governing agent in Hestian (domestic) matters while the Hermean (public) world is to be under the control of men operating under the "gentlemen's code" which prohibits taking unfair advantage of the weak and powerless.

To apply a Hestian hermeneutic to Beecher's work allows us to reconstruct her intent. In the following passage (with

gender changed) Howard says:

> After all, the author's vocabulary was a possession shared with her contemporaries. So was the wider 'vocabulary,' the scientific and cultural environment in which she lived. What is noteworthy about the author's work -- and the basis of its survival -- is what she does with this common possession, the insight she has into it and the fresh way she organizes it. It took a kind of 'divination' for the author to achieve this. It takes a corresponding kind of divination for the interpreter to appreciate it (Howard, 1982, p. 9. Gender references feminized.)

Understanding a work both as a textual unity and as the unified expression of an organized mind requires that -- for a time -- the reader become the "same person" as the author. To read Beecher this way, one must suspend her own modernity and travel back in time to enter the author's mind without the barrier of an "alien" language, i.e. the Victorian woman's Hestian language. We sometimes find this easier to do when reading fiction than reading "old fashioned" didactic works which seem to lose their point because what was "new knowledge" then is "old hat" now. Therefore, to understand the Treatise "supposes a process whereby the total meaning of the insightful individual is linearized in common expressions and then recapturable by a different, perhaps very different, individual" (Howard, p. 10).

As Martin has shown, Beecher's message for us today is that daily life involves both reproductive and productive

processes, and that education must enable us to meet both demands intelligently and creatively. For Home Economics, the message is clear. The Hestian concerns of yesterday are the same as they are today. These are the perennial problems of everyday existence. By applying a Hestian hermeneutic to texts, we may be able to convey this message -- and others like it -- to a wider audience.

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